

VZCZCXRO5537

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHSI #0969/01 1621414
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 101414Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9611
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000969

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT MEETS, OPPOSITION UNITY DISSOLVES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a surprise move, President Saakashvili called the new Parliament into its first session on the morning of Saturday, June 7. Caught off-guard, the Joint Opposition was unable to force the mass protests they had planned for June 8, in anticipation of Parliament meeting on June 9. As expected, Davit Bakradze was elected Speaker, and former Minister of Agriculture Petre Tsiskarishvili was elected leader of the Parliamentary Majority. The Joint Opposition and Labor parties boycotted the session as promised. However, two MPs elected on Republican majoritarian tickets and two Labor MPs from the party list attended. Bakradze appealed to the opposition with offers of engagement during his speech. Meanwhile, opposition New Rightist Chairman (and Joint Opposition leader) David Gamkrelidze and a few hundred supporters rallied outside. Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church Ilia II, after attending the opening session, condemned divisiveness in Georgian politics to the few remaining protesters outside Parliament, saying "The Georgian people represent one, united nation. The devil divides and God unites... I hope we will achieve unity." The already-fragile Joint Opposition cracked more on June 9, as leaders Gia Tortladze and Gia Tsagareishvili quit the coalition. The two have said they will join the Parliament if certain concessions are made to the opposition. It is unlikely the Joint Opposition's is finished just yet, but it appears to be on its last legs. End summary.

Opening Session

¶2. (U) Late on June 6, President Saakashvili called for Parliament to meet in its opening session on the morning of Saturday, June 7. The first session was heavily anticipated as going to occur on either June 9 or 10 - the last day it could be held by Georgian law. Saakashvili opened the session with a 7-minute speech, calling for the unity of Georgia. The ruling United National Movement (UNM) took 119 of 150 seats, comprising a constitutional majority. As expected, former Foreign Minister Davit Bakradze was elected Chairman of the Parliament (Speaker), the highest position in the government after the President. Former Minister of Agriculture Petre Tsiskarishvili was elected Majority Leader. The Joint Opposition and Labor parties boycotted the session as promised. Two MPs elected on Republican majoritarian tickets and two Labor MPs elected from the party list attended the session, but abstained from the voting.

¶3. (U) Bakradze again urged the opposition to ignore the boycott and to enter Parliament. He offered compromise proposals that would give opposition MPs increased clout within the legislative body. Some of the inducements included committee chairmanships, deputy chairmanships, a vice speaker position, and changing the law to allow 6 MPs (instead of 10) to form a faction. This last would allow both the Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM) and Labor to form their own factions. (Factions have the ability to

influence Parliament's schedule, and they are guaranteed committee seats and membership on delegations and investigatory commissions.)

Protests

14. (U) The early call for the opening session of Parliament took the opposition by surprise. Forced to call a spontaneous protest a day and a half early, only a few hundred people turned out in front of Parliament late on June 16. A few dozen people stayed through the night, and less than a thousand showed in the morning. The opposition never mustered enough bodies to close Rustaveli Avenue, as they have repeatedly done in the past. United Opposition leaders, including David Gamkrelidze and Levan Gachechiladze, gave dramatic speeches reiterating their commitment to boycott Parliament and call for new elections, while disparaging those opposition parties who have determined to enter Parliament (namely, Giorgi Targamadze's CDM). Gamkrelidze, Gachechiladze, and a few others made a show of cutting up their MP mandates with scissors. The rally dispersed approximately one hour after Parliament convened.

Patriarch's Visit

15. (U) Ilia II, the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church attended the opening session of Parliament. Following this, in a significant gesture of outreach, he briefly addressed the remaining protesters outside and encouraged them to engage the government productively rather than through

TBILISI 00000969 002 OF 002

continued demonstrations. He said, "The Georgian people represent one, united nation. The devil divides and God unites... I hope we will achieve unity."

Cracks in the Opposition

16. (SBU) Cracks have begun to appear within the Joint Opposition since the end of the Parliamentary elections on May 21. On Our Own, a small opposition party already left the Joint Opposition in May, and the CDM ran independently of the coalition ticket. Elected CDM officials have issued a statement declaring their intent to enter Parliament, although they were absent from its opening session. Reportedly, they are preparing a list of demands for entering the Parliament. Two individual members of the Joint Opposition coalition, Gia Tortladze and Gia Tsagareishvili, quit the coalition (by which they were elected) on June 9, citing the dominant role of the New Rights Party within the bloc. They also intend to enter Parliament, pending certain concessions by the majority (including no changes to the constitution without consent of the opposition and direct election of mayors and governors, a key demand by the CDM as well). Another leader, Jondi Bagaturia of the Georgian Troupe party remains undecided. Irakli Iashvili, a New Rightist MP in the previous Parliament and MP-elect, announced on June 9 that he was leaving the party and politics for good.

What Next for the Opposition?

17. (SBU) The permanent boycott of Parliament appears to be the breaking point that divided the opposition MPs over whether or not to accept their mandates. Most of the Labor Party, as well as the leadership of the eight-party Joint Opposition, remain firm in boycotting Parliament. So far, it appears that at least 10 of 31 opposition MPs will enter Parliament, although the terms which would allow the CDM to enter are as yet unclear. What is clear, is that the opposition has failed in its call for a complete boycott of

Parliament, and the Joint Opposition's unity is failing fast.

As Gamkrelidze still leads the New Rightists and has the largest say in the bloc, it is too early to rule out his importance on future actions. Likewise, Labor has enough supporters that they could still stir the pot. However, the ruling party appears to have outsmarted the opposition again while the protests appear to have failed to resonate with the people. Consequently, the divisions among the opposition will not be repaired with further conflict, barring any significant missteps by the UNM, such as those of November 2007.

TEFFT